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STOP-LOSS

Advances in war
in Afghanistan mean freeze
in retirements, separations
could end in a few weeks

By Rod Hafemeister and Seena Simon
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

The new director of personnel says dramatic advances in Afghanistan could put an end to stop-loss in as little as one to two months.

"We're starting to see, halfway around the world, some change, some drawdown, as the effects of what we're doing is clearly coming closer to fruition," Lt. Gen. Richard "Tex" Brown III said Nov. 16.

Though he thinks it's too early to tell when some U.S. forces can return home or what the force structure will look like, Brown is optimistic that stop-loss soon will come to an end.

"I do think we're going to have some closure on the stop-loss issue, I hope in the next 30 to 60 days," he said.

Brown admits, however, that many factors — namely Guard and Reserve activations — may drive the servicewide freeze beyond his timeline.

Stop-loss was implemented Oct. 2 and is scheduled to continue through January. It has affected the retirement or separation of roughly 11,500 officers and enlisted airmen. Service leaders have said the halt is necessary while they determine mission and manning requirements for the war on terrorism.

But Brown told Air Force Times that Guard and Reserve activations play a large role in the stop-loss decision.

"For the sake of the individual, as well as an employer and our nation, I could not look in the mirror and say, 'I'm going to call up 30,000 people at the same time we're going to let out those who are already on active duty. We're just going to let them go on out the back door,'" Brown said.

"We just can't do that," Brown said. "It's politically wrong, and it's morally wrong."

And he acknowledged that additional call-ups could extend the stop-loss policy. The number of airmen who would be affected would depend on yet-unknown mission and manning requirements, Brown said.



Master Sgts. Napua Sugai, right, and Blaine Kato, both weapons directors from the 169th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Wheeler Army Air Field, Hawaii, monitor air traffic over the island. The 169th ACWS was called to active duty in October. Air Force officials say it is wrong to allow active-duty members to retire or separate while so many Air Reserve and Guard members are being called up.

The Air Force has relied heavily on reservists during Operations Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle. By mid-November, 56,450 reservists had been activated. More than half — 30,694 — are from the Air Reserve and Air Guard.

In comparison, 5,860 members of the Air reserves have activated to support operations in Kosovo and 10,643 activated for the Bosnia peacekeeping mission.

More than 43,000 were activated — over 17 months — in support of the Persian Gulf War.

And defense officials — who are authorized to activate up to 1 million reserve members — say the number of activations will grow, although they aren't saying publicly how much.

The Air National Guard and

Air Force Reserve have initiated across-the-board stop-loss policies, as well.

Making a difficult decision

The original stop-loss message, with a promise of additional guidance within 30 days, left some airmen with the impression stop-loss would be seriously cut back within a month. Air Force officials predicted otherwise and, in late October, announced it would be extended for all career fields through the end of January.

Calling the servicewide stop-loss a "very difficult decision," Brown said it was necessary because mission and manning requirements are not easily defined.

He gave the example of heavily tasked security forces troops who are augmented by

other career fields to perform base security duty, subsequently increasing the workload for their colleagues back in their shop.

"How do I turn around and tell supply they can let their people go" when half of their supply unit is providing augmentee help to the security forces, Brown said.

The major commands, Guard and Reserve have been asked to monitor their taskings and personnel needs and provide a list of specialty codes that can be exempt from stop-loss. Service leaders want to start releasing some career fields as soon as it's practical, the Air Force said.

There likely will be no variation of who is exempt between the active duty and reserves, said Lt. Col. James Clifford, the chief of Air Guard recruiting

and retention.

But determining who is exempt is tough because service leaders are shooting at a moving target. Missions are changing by the hour, making it difficult to lock in any stop-loss guidance.

The Air Force will continue to consider waivers for hardship cases, Brown said.

Who gets waivers and why

Air Force leaders have been approving almost nine out of every 10 stop-loss waivers since the policy took effect Oct. 2.

Exceptions to stop-loss typically are for hardship, mandatory retirement or the good of the service.

As of Nov. 15, 336 waiver requests had been processed by the major commands and forwarded to the Air Force Personnel Center at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas.

Of those, 302 had been approved by the respective MAJCOM commanders — 199 enlisted members and 103 officers — and 34 had been disapproved. Lt. Col. Michael Maloney, chief of separations at the personnel center, said the disapprovals were roughly equal between officer and enlisted. The enlisted approvals included 24 chief master sergeants, Maloney said.

The Air Reserve and Air Guard decide who will be granted waivers from their respective commands.

As of Nov. 19, 56 of 133 waiver requests from Air guardsmen had been granted, about 90 percent of them for people transferring to the active duty or other reserve branches, Clifford said.

Figures for the Air Reserve were unavailable by press time.

The stop-loss policy puts the decision for approving waivers for active-duty airmen in the hands of the MAJCOM commanders.

An Oct. 29 message from the deputy chief of staff for personnel included a list of officer and enlisted Air Force specialty codes considered "most critical and stressed" that MAJCOM

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